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# Developing a Comprehensive Preschool Curriculum Framework

# Developing a Written Curriculum Framework

The written curriculum framework describes how the program will implement key elements of a quality curriculum aligned with the RI Early Learning Standards. Developing the curriculum framework is the first step towards ensuring that consistent, high-quality teaching practices are implemented throughout the program. Teaching staff utilize a curriculum framework to guide the design, selection, and adaptation of learning experiences that reflect the unique characteristics of the children they serve.

The framework helps to ensure that teaching staff plan and implement their classroom curriculum based on commonly-held theories, current research, and promising practices about how children learn and develop, with attention given to the individual needs and interests in a group in relation to program goals.<sup>1</sup> The framework should also describe how information is obtained from families to learn about children, develop individual goals for children, design culturally-relevant learning opportunities, and help inform overall curriculum planning.

The curriculum framework should include a statement about how teaching staff will use the framework to guide the development of classroom-level learning experiences for children (i.e. lesson plans). The contents should address the key elements of a quality curriculum as follows:

## (1) What Children Should Know, Understand, and Be Able to Do (Content)

Programs may want to:

- List the learning goals for children in all 8 areas of learning, as outlined in the RI Early Learning Standards or adapt and augment this list to meet the needs of their particular program (scope).
- Include information on the developmental continuum for each of the learning goals (sequence).
- Augment information within the RI Early Learning Standards with goals and indicators important to the program

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment in Programs Serving Children Ages 3 Through 8: A position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education* Adopted November 1990

- Ensure that the information included in the content is accurate and credible according to the recognized standards within the discipline of early childhood

Program should describe how this information is used to guide the development of learning experiences at the classroom level.

## (2) How Children Learn (Process)

Programs should draw from theories and research in the field of early childhood to articulate key concepts of child development and learning that guide teaching practice in their program. Examples include:

- Key research on human growth and development that guide teaching practice (i.e. growth and development is orderly and sequential and proceeds from simple to complex; children grow and develop at different rates within each learning area)
- Theoretical perspectives on learning that guide teaching and learning in your program such as those expressed by Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner, Gardner, and the Reggio Emilia approach.
- A statement describing how intentional play experiences are the vehicle through which young children learn and how children learn best in an environment that promotes and encourages exploration and inquiry
- Key factors that influence children's learning (i.e. child's individual learning needs, social and cultural context, children's interests, and children's learning styles)
- A description of how engagement and social interaction are vehicles through which children learn

Programs should describe how this information is used to guide the planning of daily learning experiences at the classroom level.

## (3) The Teacher's Role (Teaching and Facilitating)

The curriculum framework should include information on the important role of teacher interactions and the different teaching strategies that will be used in planning and implementing quality learning experiences. Programs should draw from theories and research in the field of early childhood when describing teachers' roles. The description may include information regarding the:

- Continuum of teaching strategies that teachers use to support each child's learning
- NAEYC's *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs* description of intentional practice
- Balance of individual, small, and large group experiences
- Balance of teacher-directed and child-initiated activities
- Teacher's role in individualizing and differentiating teaching based on the developmental level, interests, and learning style of each child
- Critical teaching skills that support teacher-child interactions related to emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support

Programs should describe how teachers use this information to guide the planning of daily learning experiences at the classroom level.

#### (4) Materials and Learning Environments (Context)

Programs should describe the importance of designing and creating culturally relevant learning environments that offer children opportunities to explore, discover, and feel safe. The description may include:

- Guidelines for room arrangement and learning centers
- Use of a daily schedule to provide structure and consistency for children
- The importance of creating a classroom climate that is positive, nurturing, and stimulating
- The relationship between environments and materials and children's learning and behavior
- Information on the selection of developmentally-appropriate supplies and materials
- Guidance for providing space that supports children's quiet or individual time
- Description of how both indoor and outdoor space is used for learning

Programs should describe how teachers use this information to guide the planning of daily learning experiences at the classroom level.

# Selecting Curriculum Resources

**M**any programs utilize commercially-produced curriculum resources to guide teachers in planning and implementing quality curriculum in one or more of the following four elements of a quality curriculum:

- (1) What Children Should Know, Understand, and Be Able to Do (Content)
- (2) How Children Learn (Process)
- (3) The Teacher's Role (Teaching and Facilitating)
- (4) Materials and Learning Environments (Context)

Programs should be thoughtful in their selection of curriculum resources and ensure that the content is consistent with commonly-held theories and current research in the field of early childhood. Curriculum resources should also be selected that promote partnerships with families in the planning and implementation of classroom curriculum.

Questions to consider when choosing curriculum resources include the following:

## (1) What Children Should Know, Understand, and Be Able to Do (Content)

- Does it help achieve the various learning goals within the eight domains of learning as outlined in the RI Early Learning Standards?
- Does it encourage development of positive feelings and dispositions toward learning while leading to acquisition of knowledge and skills?
- Does it facilitate integration of content across learning areas?
- Do the expectations allow the children to master current skills as well as provide appropriate challenges that lead to new skill acquisition?
- Is the information in the content accurate and credible according to the recognized standards of the relevant discipline?
- Is this content worth knowing?
- Does it build on and extend children's current knowledge and abilities?
- Does it promote the development of higher order abilities, such as thinking, reasoning, problem solving, and decision making?

## (2) How Children Learn (Process)

- Is it of interest to children and to the teacher?
- Is it meaningful for these children and relevant to the children's lives?
- Does it promote interactive learning and encourage the child's construction of knowledge?
- Does it lead to conceptual understanding by helping children construct their own understanding in meaningful contexts?
- Does it expect, allow, and appreciate individual differences?
- Does it foster children's exploration and inquiry, rather than focusing on "right" answers or "right" ways to complete a task?
- Does it promote and encourage social interaction among children and adults?
- Does it encourage active learning and allow children to make meaningful choices?
- Does it provide experiences that promote feelings of success, competence, and enjoyment of learning?

### (3) The Teacher's Role (Teaching and Facilitating)

- Does it allow for the teacher to make it more relevant by relating it to a personal experience children have had, or can they easily gain direct experience with it?
- Does it permit flexibility for children and teachers to meet the individual and collective needs of children?
- Does it emphasize and specify the teacher's role in supporting children's learning?
- Does it balance child-directed and teacher-initiated interactions?
- Does it support teachers in implementing critical teaching skills that support positive teacher-child interactions?

### (4) Materials and Learning Environments (Context)

- Does it lead to the creation of a learning environment that is sensitive to and respectful of cultural and linguistic diversity?
- Does it promote feelings of psychological safety, security, and belonging?
- Are supplies and materials appropriate to the developmental stages of children?
- Does it promote adaptation and accommodation for children with special needs?
- Are the materials affordable and easily accessible to teaching staff?

Adapted from *Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment in Programs Serving Children Ages 3 Through 8: A position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education*  
Adopted November 1990

## Implementing the Curriculum

**D**eveloping a written curriculum framework and selecting curriculum resources are the first steps towards implementing a quality curriculum. Program leaders must then take the next steps towards implementation. These steps include:

- Identifying the core competencies needed by teaching staff to implement a quality curriculum
- Providing orientation, training, and mentoring so that teaching professionals understand the content of the curriculum framework and how it is to be used to guide teaching practice at the classroom level
- Determining individual teacher's progress in implementing all aspects of the curriculum framework, demonstrating core competencies, and achieving positive outcomes for children
- Providing professional development and supports to teaching staff to support them in achieving professional development goals and improving outcomes for children

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